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# SELECTED POEMS

Afrizal Malna

translated by Sarah Maxim and Linda Owens

## Introduction:

Afrizal Malna, the poet, essayist and playwright, was born in Jakarta in 1957. Some of his published works include *Abad yang Berlari* (1984), *Yang Berdiam dalam Mikropon* (1990), and *Arsitektur Hujan* (1995). Other poems and essays have appeared in edited anthologies, including *Perdebatan Sastra Kontekstual* (Ariel Heryanto, ed., 1986), *Tonggak Puisi Indonesia Modern 4* (Linus Suryadi, ed., 1987) and *Traum der Freiheit Indonesien 50 Jahre nach der Unabhangigkeit* (Hendra Pasuhuk & Edith Koesoemawiria, eds., Koln, 1995).

As noted in a recent review of his latest work, *Arsitektur Hujan*, in the May 2, 1996 edition of the Indonesian news magazine *Tiras*, Afrizal's themes tend to revolve around depictions of the modern world and urban life and on presentations of material objects from this environment. Afrizal's poems often confuse his readers, especially those expecting to find some clear meaning or moral message. He tries to establish links between material objects in his poems, and it is this correspondence between objects that creates his poetic sense and style. Afrizal also believes in continually revising his work and may rewrite a poem many times even if earlier versions have already been published or otherwise released.

Afrizal's work as a playwright has been closely connected with the theater group Teater Sae, and he has written a number of plays and performance pieces for them, including *Ekstase Kematian Orang-orang* (1984), *Pertumbuhan di Atas Meja Makan* (1991), *Biografi Yanti Setelah 12 Menit* (1992), and *Migrasi dari Ruang Tamu* (1993). Afrizal's trip to Europe with Teater Sae in 1993 has had a significant impact on the imagery and language of his newer poems, as can be seen in some of the poems presented here.

Afrizal has received a number of awards and prizes for his work, both in Indonesia and abroad. He lives in Jakarta with his wife and daughter.

### Poems and Translations

#### Kesibukan Membakar Sampah

Harga cabe naik lagi, 1000 rupiah yang lalu. Berita-berita dari pemerintah jadi seragam penuh ancaman, bersama inflasi, dan tumpukan kredit bank. Siapa bercermin di situ, dingin dan basah, penuh nyonya-nyonya mencukur bulu kakinya di salon. Bicaranya seperti jam-jam tidurmu yang berbusa, biru kehitam-hitaman. Ini belum berselang dua gelas eskrim yang lalu: "Apakah saya harus bertanggung jawab juga pada sampah, dan mimpi buruk kebersihan umum?"

Sampah yang dibakar telah habis. Abu panas masih terasa, seperti jam 2 siang dalam rumahmu. Ada kain basah menutupi kepalaku, tak pernah terbakar. Tetapi kemanakah api itu menghilang? Ada penipu di sini, menawarkan buku di sore hari. Ia membawa tas, berkaca mata seperti Freud. Aku lihat kakiku mulai berubah, jadi bola-bola api. Asap yang membumbung masih menyimpan dirinya dalam bara. Selamat pagi, Tuan. Mobil telah siap mengantarmu jadi kanak-kanak. Dan mulai mengerti, kemana api itu menghilang.

Ada ketakutan ikut terseret, ketika botol-botol plastik dan sobekan koran mulai terbakar, membuat pengetahuan dari api. Lalu seseorang melarikan diri dari bungkusan plastik ... Jangan bergerak! Mari aku potret.

1995

#### Busy Burning Trash

The price of chili peppers has gone up again, 1000 rupiah ago. The news from the government has become a uniform full of menace, along with inflation, and piles of bank credit. Who is mirrored there, cold and wet, full of women shaving their legs in the salon. Talking like your bed times that foam blue-black. It's not yet two cups of ice cream ago: "Must I be responsible for garbage too, and the bad dreams of public cleanliness?"

The burning garbage is gone. The hot ashes can still be felt, like 2 in the afternoon in your house. There is a wet cloth covering my head, it never catches on fire. But where did that fire go? There is a trickster here, offering me books in the afternoon. He carries a briefcase, wearing glasses like Freud. I see my feet starting to change, becoming balls of fire. The rising smoke is still hiding itself in the coals. Good morning, sir. The car is all ready to take you to become a child. And begin to understand, where the fire went.

A fear gets dragged in when the plastic bottles and the pieces of newspaper start to burn, making knowledge from fire. Then someone escapes from the plastic package ... Don't move! Let me take your picture.

1995

Translated by Sarah Maxim

### Bis Membawa Mereka Pergi

Dengan bis yang asing, kami tinggalkan rumah-rumah tanpa listrik itu. Berangkat ke negeri-negeri baru, tumbuh di sepanjang jalan. Senja tertahan pada pendaran lampu-lampu neon, dan orang-orang hanya tinggal bayang-bayang berkelebat. Begitu saja anak-istri kami berdandan baju merah biru. Kami putar impian-impian Amerika, seperti makhluk-mahluk yang setiap saat sibuk mengubah diri.

Kota seperti etalase dihuni jam weker yang buas di situ. Menangkapi ikan-ikan dari limbah industri. Lalu kami bersorak, kami bisa bekerja apa saja, mengangkat batu, memindahkan hutan dan sungai-sungai, atau mencuri. Tetapi siapakah kami, di antara siaran-siaran TV itu, menyentuh sunyi di tengah pasar.

Kalau kami telah pergi bersama hembusan angin, tua dan kering, kami menetes pada setiap impian jadi manusia. Seperti daerah berbahaya yang terbuka, tanpa ada siapa pun yang bisa bicara lagi di situ.

1985

### A Bus Takes Them Away

In a strange bus, we left the houses with no electricity. Leaving for new countries, growing up along the way. Twilight lingers in the glow of the neon lights, and what's left of people is only shadows flitting by. Just like that our children and wives dress up in red-blue clothes. We spin American dreams like creatures who are busy changing themselves each instant.

The city is like a shop window inhabited by a savage alarm clock. Catching fish from industrial waste. Then we shout, we can do any job, lift rocks, move forests and rivers, or steal. But who are we, in between the TV broadcasts, touching the silence in the midst of the marketplace.

If we have gone with a blast of wind, old and dry, we drip on every dream of becoming human. Like an open, dangerous area, without anyone able to talk there again.

1985

Translated by Sarah Maxim

### Saya Menyetrika Pakaian

Dia adalah deru kereta . . . Seorang wanita Indonesia di Bern, membuat bahasa aneh, dari jaket kulit dan pembebasan visa: "Suami saya seorang Italia. Tetapi saya dari Gunung Kidul." Di sungai Melezza, batu-batu berkaca menghanyutkan kembali lukisan-lukisan Bacon, jadi bangkai-bangkai rumah Abad 20. Rasialisme telah tertanam dalam warna kulitku. Dia adalah sapi dan sepeda, di antara gereja, cafe, dan batang-batang rel kereta.

Perkenalkan, namaku Muhamad Amin, dari Irak. Tapi sebuah negeri telah membuat aku hidup hanya dari wortel, *body lotion*, dan paspor yang menyimpan keresahan para imigran. Dia adalah seorang Jerman, yang belajar tersenyum, dari tomat-tomat yang tumbuh di balkon. *Danke*. Revolusi Iran telah mengusirku hanya karena teater. Lalu para seniman menolak setrikaan di Monte Verito. Dia adalah ... tiba-tiba ingin jadi

mahluk danau, di Ascona. Mengirim bukit-bukit berhimpitan, tanpa Hitler, Madonna, atau si jenggot itu: Ini tembok untukmu, Berlin, jangan sedih.

Tetapi bank-bank telah menanam Suisse, seperti bunga di kamar mandi, siapa yang mau bunuh diri dengan keindahan. *Wi, wi . . . mari*. Dia telah membuat sebuah negeri dari perahu penyeberangan, di sepanjang sungai Rhein. Tetapi di sebuah pesta ulang tahun, dia adalah sejumlah pelukan bernyanyi . . . *oh, may papa . . .* "Namaku Lili dari Madagaskar," dalam bahasa Perancis tercekik.

1993

### **I Iron the Clothes**

She is the rumbling of the train . . . An Indonesian woman in Bern, makes a strange language, from a leather jacket and the freedom of a visa: "My husband is Italian. But I am from Gunung Kidul." In the Melezza River, the glistening stones sweep away again the paintings of Bacon, and become the skeletons of 20th century houses. Racism has already been embedded in the color of my skin. He is a cow and a bike, between the church, the cafe and the railway tracks.

Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Muhamad Amin, from Iraq. But one country has made me live only on carrots, body lotion, and a passport which stores up the anxieties of immigrants. He is a German, who is learning to smile, from tomatoes growing on his balcony. Danke. Iran's Revolution has kicked me out only on account of the theater. Then the artists refused to iron in Monte Verita. She is . . . suddenly wishing to become a lake creature, in Ascona. Sending hills compressed together, without Hitler, Madonna or that bearded guy: This wall is for you, Berlin, don't be sad.

But the banks have invested in Switzerland, like a flower in the bathroom, who wants to kill themselves with beauty. *Wi, wi . . . come here*. She made a country out of ferries all along the Rhine. But at a birthday party, she is a dozen hugs singing . . . *oh, my papa . . .* "My name is Lily from Madagascar," in strangled French.

1993

Translated by Sarah Maxim

### **100 Tahun dari Ibu Kathi**

*Tetapi di sebuah desa, dengan hutan-hutan kecil di Jegenstorf, sebuah kantor pos, tumbuh bunga-bunga rumput dengan nama sedih: Vergissmeinnicht—Jangan lupakan saya . . .*

Lalu ia memotret dengan tubuh tua gemetar, waktu yang gemetar juga, dan tahu: Kami pernah bertemu 100 tahun yang lalu. Kathi, Kathi yang lampau, gerimis merumuskan tubuh kita kembali, di bawah cuaca dingin, lukisan cat air Albert Anker. Tetapi di lembah itu, tubuhmu jadi hamparan gendum terbakar. Udara telah jadi kota padat, Kathi. Aku kunjungi juga menu berbagai bangsa, suku-suku tua di museum antropologi. Tapi tak kutemui juga kau di sana. Dari 100 Tahun, potret gemetar menyimpan orang-orang diburu, dalam tubuhku. Langit jadi putih masai, seperti spreng yang kau tinggalkan di lembah itu. 100 tahun kau telah pergi jadi unggas, Kathi, hingga tak ada lagi tangan terjulur di jendela itu: Kita hanya membuat kata, pada sepi 100 tahun di luar sana.

Aku turuni lagi tangga-tangga lembah itu. Ketika aku genggam, burung-burung beterbangan dari tangannya. 100 Tahun telah mengubah kita jadi sungai, Kathi. Lalu aku bawaan selendang berenda, kebaya bersulam dari Tenggara. Tetapi tanganmu tua gemetar, menyentuh bahu 100 tahun: Di lembah itu, di lembah itu . . . *vergissmeinnicht*, Kathi.

1993

### 100 Years from Ibu<sup>1</sup> Kathi

But in a village, with miniature forests in Jegenstorf, a post office, grow grassy flowers with a melancholy name: *Vergissmeinnicht*—Forget me not . . .

She takes a picture then with her trembling old body, time that trembles also, and knows: We met once 100 years ago. Kathi, the past Kathi, drizzle refigures our bodies, beneath the chill, an Albert Anker watercolor. But in that valley, your body turns to a carpet of burnt grain. The air has become a crowded city, Kathi. I visit too the menu of many nations, old tribes in the museum of anthropology. But I don't find you there either. Of 100 years, the trembling portrait preserves the hunted people, within my body. The sky turns tangled white, like the bedsheet you left in that valley. Gone 100 years, you have turned to fowl, Kathi, till there no longer juts a hand from that window: We only make words, in the 100 year solitude out there.

I go down the steps of that valley again. When I grasp her hand, birds scatter from it in flight. 100 years have made us into a river, Kathi. When I bring you a lace shawl, an embroidered blouse from the Southeast. But your old trembling hand, touches the shoulder of 100 years: In that valley, in that valley . . . *vergissmeinnicht*, Kathi.

1993

Translated by Linda Owens

### Antropologi dari Kaleng-Kaleng Coca-Cola

Holger, di Beerental Weg ini, apartemenmu, aku lihat wayang kulit Jawa, seperti jendela-jendela tertutup itu. Kau sembunyikan juga, Marx dan Budha dalam rak-rak buku. Di manakah manusia kalian temukan, di antara kartu pos, donat, dan serakan tissue. Langit mencium sisa-sisa waktu, pada detak sepatumu, putih melulu, putih melulu.

Tapi kaos kakiku tak cukup menahan dingin, udara Hamburg bersama orang-orang sunyi dari bangsanya sendiri. Aku lihat boneka 10 negeri, seperti pasangan tua di Hannover, mereka tersenyum: Bisakah menata kota, denga tomat dan tissue melulu. Mereka dibawa dari televisi yang lain, dari desa-desa kecil, belajar elektronika, dan membuat wesel. Langit, tissue berlapis-lapis, putih melulu, putih melulu.

Tetapi seorang lelaki adalah kisah lain, Holger, yang meletakkan dirinya dalam sepi lampu-lampu 5 watt. Dan membuat bisik-bisik, dalam bahasa Jerman yang beku. Lalu dari apartemen ini, kita tahu, Holger, di luar orang berlalu, berlalu . . . meletakkan

<sup>1</sup> "mother"—also respectful form of address to a woman who is older or in a higher position, ie teacher, employer, etc.

bangsanya, tanpa membanting ember: kita hanya mengenang manusia, dari kota-kota, yang ditata kaleng-kaleng coca-cola.

1993

### **Anthropology of Coca-Cola Cans**

Holger, here in Beerental Weg, your apartment, I see Javanese shadow puppets, like those closed windows. You are hiding as well, Marx and Buddha in the bookshelves. Where do you find humanity, amongst the postcards, doughnuts, and shredded tissue. The sky kisses the traces of time, in the tapping of your shoes, white through and through, white through and through.

But my socks don't keep out the cold, the Hamburg air and people isolated from their own nation. I see the dolls of ten countries, like elderly couples in Hanover, they smile: Can you plan a city, with tomatoes and tissues alone. They are transported from another television, from small villages, they study electronics, and draft money orders. Sky, layer upon layer of tissue, white through and through, white through and through.

But a man is a different story, Holger, who places himself in the desolation of 5 watt bulbs. And makes whispering, in frozen German. From this apartment then, we know, Holger, outside people pass by, pass by . . . laying down their nation, not tipping the pail: we are merely reminded of humans, from cities, arranged of coca-cola cans.

1993

Translated by Linda Owens

### **Seorang Lelaki di Benteng Fort Rotterdam**

Saya temui lelaki itu, sisa-sisa tubuh sebuah koloni, di bangunan tua lantai atas, Benteng Fort Rotterdam. Ia seperti hempasan ombak pantai Losari, membuat bantal tidur saya berkeringat di malam hari. Udara laut membuat sebuah lubang di pintu, lalu bercerita tentang hantu-hantu tentara berbaris di malam hari, jeritan perempuan dari sumur tua, dan biskuit di piring seketika habis dalam kerubungan semut merah. Benteng Fort Rotterdam jadi bulu kudukku yang berdiri, penuh nyawa kehilangan kamar, di antara bangunan tua tempat anak-anak kursus bahasa Inggris. Tak saya ajak lelaki itu makan nasi goreng, berderetan di pantai Losari. Untuk mengenalnya, saya harus membayangkan seorang lelaki memancang tubuhnya pada tembok-tembok Benteng Somba Opu, dari serangan meriam Kompeni yang mengepungnya dari laut. Saya merasa sendiri dengan sepatu buatan Jerman di kaki saya, bersama udara laut yang tak henti mengirim garam-garam halus di bibir saya. Kisah itu membuat batu berjatuhan pada kalimat-kalimatnya, keras, urat di tangan menutup malam.

Siang hari, peperangan dengan Kompeni berlangsung kembali, dengan kursus-kursus bahasa Inggris, musik-musik metal dalam kendaraan-kendaraan umum, film-film Amerika di TV, anggaran belanja daerah ...

Ram, sahabatku, aku tinggalkan seorang lelaki di lantai atas bangunan tua itu, mengucur hingga tempat tidur ibumu.

1994

**A Man at Fort Rotterdam**

I met with the man, the bodily remains of a colony, upstairs in an old building, Fort Rotterdam. He was like the pounding of the breakers on Losari beach, making my pillow sweat in the night. The sea air made a hole in the door, then told of soldiers' specters marching in formation at night, a woman's screams from inside an old well, and a biscuit on a plate instantly consumed in a swarm of red ants. Fort Rotterdam is my hair standing on end, full of homeless souls, among the old buildings where children take English lessons. I didn't invite the man to eat fried rice along Losari Beach. To know him, I must imagine a man staking his body to the walls of Fort Somba Opu, against the Company's cannon attacks besieging it from the sea. I feel alone with German-made shoes on my feet, and the sea air delivering endless fine salt upon my lips. That tale makes rocks rain down on his sentences, hard, tendons in the hand holding the night.

Midday, war with the Company resumes, with English lessons, Heavy Metal on the public buses, American films on TV, the regional spending budget...

Ram, my friend, I left a man upstairs in that old building, gushing up to your mother's bed.

1994

Translated by Linda Owens